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# The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Volume LXII Issue IV—March 2020

## State Rep. Michelle Ciccolo Holds LHS Office Hours

Emily Ma
News Editor

On Jan. 13, Massachusetts State Representative Michelle Ciccolo held office hours at Lexington High School to discuss ongoing issues such as gun control and climate change with students. Ciccolo has served on the Lexington Planning Board in the past, and is currently Vice Chair of the Lexington Board of Selectmen.

"One of my priorities as a state representative is to include all of my constituents in conversations about what is going on in the Commonwealth...Hearing from students in both of the communities I represent in the legislature was a terrific opportunity for me to gauge what issues are important to my young constituents," Ciccolo said.

Around 20 students attended the after-school event, which was held in the LHS Library. Ciccolo meets regularly with her constituents, holding monthly office hours at schools and other locations throughout the 15th Middlesex District.

"I think it is extremely important for politicians to make time to speak to and hear from young people. All of us—parents, teachers, politicians—need to impress upon young people, who will soon be eligible to vote, the importance of participating in our political process," Harriet Wallen, an LHS librarian, said.

Wallen believes that everyone has the power to make a difference through voting and political participation.

"My philosophy is, 'If you don't participate, you don't have the right to complain.' Every one of us who votes has the potential to change things. Every vote counts," Wallen said.

Several politicians have held office hours at LHS in the past. Carin Casey, an LHS librarian, hopes this will continue.

"I do very much like the idea of representatives taking opportunities to talk to students, and appreciate opportunities for students to expand their horizons and express their informed opinions about current events," Casey said.

Consistently staying informed about the news can be overwhelming, so to answer questions and help people better understand policies, Ciccolo encourages her constituents to reach out to her.

*State Representative Michelle Ciccolo holds office hours at LHS.* Photo by Megha Prasad

"Any student is always welcome to contact me... I do my best to get everyone who writes to me a timely response, but if you need information more urgently, you can always call my office at the State House," Ciccolo said.

Attending office hours and contacting politicians allows students to express their opinions, which Ciccolo finds invaluable as a public servant.

"Hearing from our terrific young people is critical to my job, and I thank those who came to my office hours last month. [I] hope to hear from everyone at LHS soon," Ciccolo said.

## Sunrise Lex Strikes for Climate

Vedanti Bhargava
Laasya Chiduruppa
Staff Writers

On Jan. 15, the Lexington High School Sunrise Club presented a Climate Emergency Declaration to the Lexington Board of Selectmen. The club is a branch of the larger Sunrise Movement, a nationwide youth-led climate organization. With increasing discussion and awareness about climate change, the club's declaration has gained traction.

According to Lauren Wu, the club's Social Media Lead, having an official declaration is the springboard for future initiatives.

"If [...] someone was arguing that climate change isn't real, or a problem, we can look at the [declaration] and say that we as a town declared it was, [so] it cannot be an argument anymore. So that leaves us open to talk about going on to the next step and doing better things," Wu said.

The club is concerned that Boston's coastal location poses a risk in the face of climate change, and hopes that passing an emergency declaration will push Lexington to act.

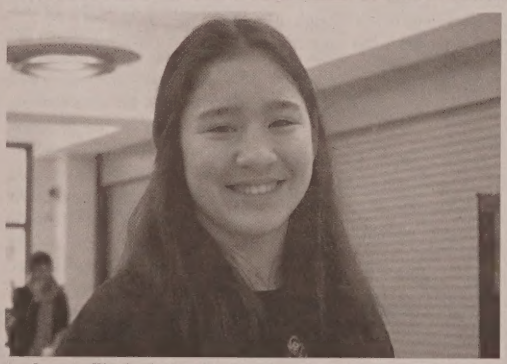
"It would just be...saying that climate change is happening, and that we understand that it will affect us and has disastrous effects on the world and everything. Other towns in Massachusetts have done it too, where they've said that [they] understand that Boston itself is a coastal area, and there will be tons of land that will be washed away," Anya Rao, the club's Actions and Campaign Leader, said.

In addition to the emergency declaration, the Sunrise Club has initiated community events that have directly involved LHS students, such as the LHS Climate Strike in September, which amassed a turnout of hundreds of people.

"I feel that more people know about Sunrise now, because it is a youth-led movement. Many of my friends, I'll tell them, 'I'm a part of Sunrise,' and they'll say, 'Oh, what's that?' and I'll explain it, and that's kind of like the chain of where I'll tell one person and they'll tell the next, and it's the spreading of that, so that people are aware of it," Rao said.

Wu agrees with this idea of a chain reaction, and believes that towns should be supporting each other on a larger scale.

"One important thing is that we need to set an example for other towns. We like to think [of] ourselves as leading the way. We need to become part of that movement and taking that step as a town is really important," Wu said.



*Lauren Wu is Lexington Sunrise Club's Social Media Leader* Photo by Olivia Hoover

In March, the Sunrise Club plans to present the emergency declaration to the general public at a town meeting.

"Even if it's the smallest thing like helping us set up a table, we'll know that you were there, and you'll know what our message is, and you'll be able to spread it," Rao said.

The LHS Sunrise Team hopes that Lexington will take more steps to discuss and act on climate change.

" It's really something important that needs to be done. It's an emergency. It should impact what we think about what we are doing. It should impact the community. I hope that it will," Wu said.

# In Defense of the Extracurricular Funding Scheme

■ The Editorial Board

Extracurriculars are an integral part of the high school experience. At Lexington High School, a plethora of extracurriculars exist.

It is a reality that unequal funding accompanies these groups. For instance, Model UN students are required to pay upwards of hundreds of dollars to attend a conference, whereas a portion of the Lexington Public School's annual budget is dedicated for athletics. While not perfect, the administration's role in funding various LHS groups is justified.

"An extracurricular activity is anything a student does outside of the school day," Nicole Canniff, the club director at LHS, said.

For a select number of clubs, advisors receive stipends, or fixed payments. This includes the LHS Science Team and Model UN. Canniff explains that the majority of clubs are intended to be student run, which includes financial responsibilities. Meanwhile, stipended clubs are reserved for those that require adult supervision for trips or weekend meetings. Outside of advisor stipends, clubs at LHS rarely receive regular funding from the administration for travel, competition fees, or anything similar.

However, one objection would be the various stipend "levels." For instance, in the 2018-2019 school year, the High School Science Team director received a "Level 1 Stipend" of $8,601.77, while High School Math Team director received a Level 2 stipend of $6,233.28. Level of commitment can explain levels of compensation. For instance, it is logical for the LHS Chem Safety Officer, who does not have as many responsibilities as a math coach, to receive a smaller stipend.

Stipends are determined by the Stipend Committee, consisting of two LEA members and two district representatives. Sarah Avon Lewis, the President of the Lexington Education Association, explains that stipends are a part of wages. Every few years, the district and LEA come together to spend hours negotiating wages.

It's unfair to say the administration's actions are unjust because they did not actively promote and sustain such discrepancies. Rather, it was an omission that, over time, has created wage gaps. Additionally, the administration is in the process of revising their determinations:

"We are hoping to systematize the process so it is fairer and more consistent," Avon Lewis said.

Another point of contestation surrounding funding disparities is the K-12 athletics program. In a fiscal year, the program has around $800,000 to $900,000 of its expenses covered by the district, a large sum of money.

While it is the common perception that the LHS Athletics Department receives an unfair budget compared to other departments, it is needed for the athletics to function. Further, a substantial portion of their budget is not covered by the district.

The LPS Athletic Department's budget is broken up into two categories, the operating budget and the revolving budget.

The operating budget, Martin explains, is given to the department at the beginning of every fiscal year. It is $900,000 that the district covers, primarily for coach salaries.

The remaining $700,000 in the budget comes from the revolving account, which the LPS Athletic Department raises independently. The responsibility to raise this money for the budget explains the need for user fees, payments required to participate in athletic activities. In addition, similar to other clubs, many sports teams have booster clubs, which provide more funds for individual teams.

The money from the revolving account is used for necessities such as purchasing equipment. Hence, the lifeblood of the athletics department is not the administration, but comes out of the pockets of students, just like any other extracurricular.

Andrew Stephens, the principal of Lexington High School, emphasizes that the administration is trying its best to create an equitable funding scheme.

"I'd love it to be different… But, it's also the reality… there is inequity, but there are really good reasons and really hard workarounds," Stephens said.

# Collegebored - Advice for Juniors

■ Elizabeth Zhang
Columnist

Stop what you're doing and spare a moment for this short questionnaire. Answer honestly.

Are you sad?

Are you tired?

Are you sick of people asking you where you want to go to college, even though all you're trying to do right now is not fail your classes?

Are you not even thinking about the application process yet?

Do you want to just quit school and skip ahead to second-semester senior year?

If you answered yes to most, if not all, of these questions, you're probably an overwhelmed, sleep-deprived junior!

As a senior who has finished submitting her applications (whoop whoop congratulations to all y'all out there), I can say with 102% confidence that junior year was one hell of a year—and not in a good way. And it doesn't get any better senior year, contrary to popular belief.

All of us seniors know what you're going through. You've heard that junior year is the one colleges pay attention to the most, the year you need to try hardest for your grades, and the year of the impending (dun dun dun) SATs. Or ACTs. Or maybe you're that kid who already took them during the summer. Regardless, it's the year colleges are suddenly like "here, take this" and shove all this pressure up your—I mean, into your hands.

It's a horrible time, and I'm genuinely sorry for those of you going through this right now.

If you have the resources available to take the SAT or ACT more than once, don't be afraid to do it. I know people who've taken their SATs three or four times. Despite this, I think more than two times is a little excessive. From what I've seen, scores start to plateau after taking the test two or three times. But if you feel you absolutely need those few extra points, then may the force be with you. Honestly do whatever you need to get to a place you're happy with. Just remember that standardized testing success isn't directly related to happiness. I personally never took the ACTs, but that's a shorter option if you don't want to go through four long, grueling hours of test-taking. I mean, I didn't want to do the SATs either, but my reaction time is like that of a grandmother's, so I was afraid I wouldn't get through reading the instructions by the time the test was over.

Junior year is a tough year, to say the least. You wake up every day to the same rigor, same pressure, same thought of "I'm almost there but I'll never get there," wanting to fall asleep, and it kind of sucks. But—and take this as you will from a senior who doesn't know how she got here—just get through today. Don't think about all the things you have to do tomorrow or the next week, and don't think about the things you could've done yesterday. Focus on what you can do right now and you'll find yourself standing with a blue cap and gown. But don't worry, you still have time for that.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# Singing Valentines: Optional or Not?

Photo by Olivia Hoover
*Singing Valentine Group Serenades Student in Commons 2*

Angie Leung
Victoria Yuan
Staff Writers

Before Valentine's Day on Feb. 14, students from all grades at Lexington High School buy Singing Valentines for friends and people they admire. Quartets of singers then serenade the receiver with a love song. Singing Valentines can be a great way to show appreciation for someone, make them laugh, or simply brighten their day.

"When I first heard the Singing Valentines, I was surprised by how much work the students put into their performances. Every group of four students wore matching outfits, and it was clear that the students were passionate about singing," Anna Zaniolo, a freshman, said.

But should receiving a Singing Valentine be a choice? Many students feel embarrassed and awkward upon being forced to sit in a chair at the front of the classroom while singers circle them. It may sometimes come as an unwelcome surprise. However, others argue that that is precisely what makes it enjoyable.

"I think it's just a fun little thing that we do with people getting embarrassed by it, but that's the fun of it," Hannah Kim, a senior and organizer of Singing Valentines, said.

Singing Valentines wouldn't be the same for the receiver if the element of surprise was gone. It would be a more memorable experience if it was done in secrecy, where being embarrassed, happy, excited or nervous is a natural response. When people are aware that a Singing Valentine is coming, that authentic reaction would be lost. They're not pranks; they're signs of affection from friends and should be taken lightly.

"I think that people should not be informed that they will be receiving a Singing Valentine, as it would ruin the surprise. If people knew that they would be getting a Singing Valentine, they might even feel inclined to opt out of the experience," Zaniolo said.

Singing Valentines are also entertaining for fellow classmates, not just the receiver. All individuals in the room can enjoy the voices and enthusiasm of the quartet of singers.

As LHS's Singing Valentine tradition continues to flourish each year, it has become treasured by many students. Singing Valentines are an excellent way to surprise a friend on Valentine's Day and spread joy throughout the LHS community.

# Toxicity and Grades

Darren Tran
Columnist

"Hey, what did you get on that last bio test? Only a 90? Bro, you have the easiest teacher, pull it together." These are words that I often hear while walking the halls of Lexington High School. Toxicity and grades go hand-in-hand here, and I don't see that changing as long as Lexington continues to foster a culture of academic rivalry.

LHS, as we know so well, is a cutthroat culture that operates on the Darwinist foundation of "survival of the fittest," whether it be with respect to academics or extracurriculars. However, a competitive culture does not necessitate being a jerk. I believe that this aggression comes from an insecurity that many Lexington students share. We believe that if someone is ahead of us, it means we are behind. As a result, we try to put others down in an effort to make ourselves feel better. Students have their own theories about the root cause of LHS's toxicity.

"I think [toxicity] stems from the fact that sometimes in an affluent town at a school with good education, people consider grades to be an indicator of how smart they are. This causes people to start to put people down," Anna Kozlova, a sophomore, said.

We as a student population should make it socially unacceptable to discuss grades with an undertone of toxicity. It ranges from making fun of other people's grades to deliberately sabotaging someone else's grades so that you can remain "on top" (an example of grade sabotage is purposefully giving someone bad constructive criticism, causing them to produce lower quality work. Cynical, yes. Exists? Absolutely).

Of course, we may still discuss our academic marks, but we should strive to not be toxic and degrade the "learning" culture that the school posits. Putting others down violates a core tenet of education and produces something along the lines of a horse race. To avoid this, we need to create a student body that supports one another. If each one of us starts to value school for learning and collaboration, then over time, LHS might transform into a place that produces people that strive to better their community and embrace challenges.

# Peer Mediation Plan to Ease Transition for Middle Schoolers

Sreenidhi Dharmaraj
Zahra Karim
Staff Writers

The transition from middle school to high school is a point of concern for eighth and ninth-grade teachers. To curb this anxiety, there are habits and skills that middle schoolers should develop before they enter high school. Luckily, the Lexington High School Student-Faculty Senate's new initiative to introduce high school training can aid this difficult transition process and resolve a lot of stress associated with this time.

When first joining the LHS community, freshmen are expected to ease into the system within the first few weeks of school and grow accustomed to the nuances of the high school system.

"High schoolers need better time management and need to learn how to join clubs without stressing out too much. Honestly, middle schoolers don't generally have the same organization skills," Michelle Wu, a sophomore, said.

Even Step Up and Orientation Day may miss some important aspects of the high school experience, such as developing social skills, choosing courses, or finding clubs to join.

"[During a Senate meeting] we also talked about partnering with counseling to get homeroom visits at the middle schools, to address some of their questions, and partnering with peer leaders during Step Up Day. I think what we've learned from multiple meetings is that the concerns middle schoolers have about high school can range from academics, to what to wear, to how to make friends, and there really is a need to find a way to get them connected with mentors that can help them through that," Caroline Li, a senior and Moderator of the Student-Faculty Senate, said.

So far, to ease the transition eighth graders must make, the Senate has discussed ways to include course advice for younger students instead of only sophomores, juniors and seniors, as well as creating apps to make navigating the campus easier.

"This stemmed from a discussion with our freshmen Senators about how to offer course advice to younger students, which right now is something we offer after school [on] one day. We just did it last week, to advise rising sophomores through seniors. The Senate came up with some pretty innovative ideas, from making a Waze app for navigating high school or just updating the map of the high school, to making a searchable FAQ section," Li said.

Still, the Senate's ideas would not cover the main obstacles ninth-graders encounter when they enter high school. More freshmen struggle with organization and stress than with course selection since there are fewer options for classes freshman year.

The Senate's concerns, however, do not mirror those of some other individuals, who believe that such initiatives would not be necessary.

"It's not a big problem. The transition isn't much harder than moving on to another grade so a special meeting isn't needed," Caroline Barry, a junior, said.

Even if some freshmen have an easier time adjusting than others, a program focused on developing skills to cope with a greater workload and new experiences would do more good than bad, regardless of the number of freshmen who would be benefitted. Senate has once again worked to help better the student experience at LHS, and their concern for freshmen ought to be adopted by all students.

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lexmusket.com for more content!

# Traffic Guards Soothe Morning Ruckus

Andrea Reier
Gaeun Suh
Staff Writers

Although traffic guards are often underappreciated, they provide a crucial service for our community. Lexington High School's traffic guards play a significant role in aiding morning commutes and ensuring the safety of members of the LHS community.

One particular traffic guard, Carolyn Boggia-Dooley, is enthusiastic about engaging with the community through her job. For over 25 years, she has worked as a crossing guard at LHS, Clarke, and Estabrook. She has also held various other positions, working as a campus monitor and substitute teacher for 12 years. Within the past two years, however, she has been dedicating longer hours to working at the high school, leaving behind her crossing guard work at the elementary and middle schools.

She can be found helping staff manage the school's logistical tasks during the school day. In the mornings she often directs traffic for students and staff in the parking lot and manages the lottery for senior and junior parking spots. In addition to that work, she supervises three I-blocks and substitutes classes on occasion. Dooley even covers lunch duties when needed and monitors the restrooms and locker rooms.

Dooley is passionate about her job as a worker all around LHS.

"I love my job. I love helping out students and keeping them safe. I am a graduate from LHS, and my children went here too. I love being able to give back to the town," Dooley said.

Her priority is to ensure that everyone is safe in their commute.

"I want to make sure that when driving through the lots, students go slow. You never know who is about to walk out," Dooley said.

Dooley also values cultivating a safe, welcoming space for students.

"I try to make sure [students] feel comfortable and can come to me no matter what," Dooley said.

Diane Murphy primarily works as a cafeteria and school monitor. However, when needed, she doubles as a traffic guard, specifically for the staff parking lot. Her dedication to the job motivates her to volunteer even in poor weather conditions, such as light rain.

Photo by Athena Li
*Diane Murphy, a traffic guard, ensures the safety LHS members*

"[I enjoy my job]. It's a very good job," Murphy said.

Traffic guards are integral contributors to our community. Hence, students should take some time to genuinely thank them for their dedication to helping the high school run safely and efficiently.

# A Peer Into Cheer-

Aditi Kalia
Meher Khanna
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School cheerleading team meets throughout the fall and winter. Cheerleading is a sport that requires strength, teamwork, and diligence, and students on the team are dedicated to doing what they love.

However, there are many challenges that accompany being a member of the cheer team, including a lack of representation in the high school athletic community, combating stereotypes and age-old prejudices, and having a difficult time garnering support for the team.

One prominent stereotype that members of the cheerleading team face is that they are a group of unintelligent, overly feminine, 'boy-crazy' girls. Zoë Prestbo, senior and co-captain of the cheerleading squad, was quick to rectify these prejudices

"Cheerleaders are one of the few teams this season that has not had to cut anyone because of our grades," Prestbo said."Cheerleaders are smart and strong, and none of us are failing. The things that are said about us are not only wildly incorrect, but insulting."

While the trope that cheerleading brings popularity is common in teen movies about high school, the reality of being on the cheer squad is often harsh.

"It doesn't bring [us] any shred of popularity; in fact, during games, the audience in the bleachers often throws things at us, like candy wrappers or other trash," Prestbo said.

On top of that, some cheerleaders experience a lack of support from people close to them regarding their involvement in the sport.

"My mom was super judgmental when I told her I wanted to do cheer, and even though she's supportive now, it was weird at the moment to get that kind of judgment from my family," Prestbo said.

Despite having to face frequent criticism from outside sources, the cheer team itself promotes an encouraging and supportive space for its members.

"During practice, it's just silly, goofy, like, a family environment. We lift each other up and we support each other, and it's a really good place to be and we can all be ourselves," Lael Watson, senior and cheer manager, said.

Although the common perception is that cheerleading isn't as rigorous as other sports, it requires a lot of physical strength and technique. For example, stunting is a type of cheerleading move in which a base with a maximum of four players sends a flier into the air.

"Stunting is really fun and being able to pull someone up is really interesting, but it's also very dangerous. What most people don't realize is just how dangerous cheer can be. We get as many in-season injuries as the other sports, we get a lot of concussions, but no one sees that side of the story, and how hard we work," Prestbo said.

Photo by Matthew Pearlman
*Zoë Prestbo, senior and Co-Captain of LHS's Cheerleading Team.*

In addition to being physically rigorous, the cheer team is also a much larger time commitment than most would assume.

"Going to football or basketball games is not actually our main job in the season. We have our own tournament and our own championship. We went to states last season, and got fifth in our division, which was better than we've ever done," Prestbo said.

Despite the dedication that the cheer team requires of its members, it often receives less attention and support than other sports.

"Nobody ever comes to our game days, even though they go farther for football or basketball games. Even if we could get a few people in the stands each qualifying tournament, it would be really motivating to the team," Prestbo said.

The atmosphere of a sporting event is heavily impacted by its attendance. Members of the Lexington community have the power to improve the environment of cheerleading competitions for the LHS cheer team, merely by attending the events.

"Just having five to ten people show raises morale and gets us to compete better," Watson said.

Prestbo believes that for a school that is striving to build community, it is essential that the student body provides the cheer team with support and love, and recognizes the unrelenting diligence and dedication that its members continually bring to the table.

"If we changed the idea around cheerleading and tried to move forward as a collective, things would move a lot quicker. But no one does that, all they see is a girl who likes dressing up and setting her hair. There is so much more to cheerleading than just that," Prestbo said.

# Michael Horn Offers LHS Students College Advice

Vidula Mannem
Rachel Zhang
Staff Writers

On Feb. 13, author and speaker Michael Horn spoke to parents about the college process during Lexington High School's Junior Parent Night. During his talk, Horn covered the complex application journey, included personal anecdotes, and addressed audience questions.

Aside from speaking annually at local high schools, Horn is also the author of four novels, the most recent being Choosing College. He published it in hopes of helping both students and parents make appropriate decisions when scheduling college tours, narrowing down college choices, and deciding majors. His presentation at LHS was centered around major themes in his book.

"[My business partners and I] were looking at a lot of colleges and feeling like they were serving students who were coming in with a lot of different reasons and motivations. They were doing a really bad job at it and making it super expensive. So we thought we should write a book to help students and parents make better decisions that are extremely costly and have a ton of social pressure," Horn said.

Horn understands the anxiety juniors face as they embark on this long process. He also empathizes with parents who feel constantly bombarded by college advice. To combat this, he makes it a priority to share a balanced perspective with rising seniors and their parents, especially in a highly competitive town like Lexington.

"I do think the hype has gotten way out of control in places like Lexington. But it's clear to me that where you go is not who you will be. You can be a big fish in a small pond and carve out a great life for yourself. Frankly, I find all the hype and pressure to be kind of sad. I would encourage students to be bigger than it," Horn said.

For any students who feel overwhelmed by the college process, Horn suggests viewing college as just one stepping stone in life.

"I would say to students that they don't need to feel like they should be part of the 'stressed out group' because their friends are, and that they don't need to feel like decisions made now will totally change their life," Horn said.

Each year, the LHS Counseling Department invites multiple college speakers like Horn to offer advice and guidance, which they hope will bring families a sense of relief.

"I think that [the presentations] can be very important for families. I know that this can be a stressful process for students and parents along the way. One of the goals and one of the hopes for that presentation was to help relieve some of those nerves and let people know that it is going to work out and be okay," Timothy McClelland, an LHS counselor, said.

As a Lexington resident himself, Horn aims to deconstruct its community's deeply rooted stigmas regarding college and prestige. He is a firm advocate of altering the mindset families have on "life choices" made during junior year.

"I think we have a lot of work to do as a community. But I'm deeply [invested] in creating a better conversation between kids and parents in Lexington, since my children will also eventually be attending LHS. I would like them to do so in a way that is not particularly stressful… We should be trying to create a healthier conversation about Why you want to go to a school as opposed to which school and how to get in," Horn said.

Similarly, the LHS Counseling Department aims to create a less stressful environment for juniors to explore various post-high school options and feel comfortable considering diverse paths in life.

"The hope is that [the college talks] will help bring that stress level down and help families and students focus on what is the right fit for them in the future. Sometimes, that is a competitive four-year school, a two-year school, gap year—there are a lot of options out there that aren't so heavily pressured and focused on high achievement," McClelland said.

Horn hopes that juniors will freely pursue their own passions and interests, and that their parents will support their choices.

"My biggest [piece of] advice to juniors is that life is too short to do what others expect of you. Instead, figure out what excites you, and follow that. It might be hard to see at the moment, but I hope that students can step back and be okay," Horn said.

# MICCA Festival Preparation

Rebecca Gu
Hannah Oh
Staff Writers

Lexington High School's attendance at the Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association's (MICCA) annual festival has become a tradition over the years. Every spring, many of LHS' attending ensembles come home with MICCA Gold, the highest award a group can receive. MICCA is an opportunity for LHS' ensembles to showcase the music they have learned to students and directors from other districts and to work with a professional clinician.

Over the years, however, as the host schools have changed, conversations have arisen about the continuation of this tradition.

"It used to be that we hosted the festival at our school, and in the past few years, a new host has been passed from us...so that sort of sparked a conversation of the festival itself, because it does cost quite a bit for bus transportation. It sparked the conversation of 'could we create that same experience in a different way, or is there a different way to access [it]?'" Garrett Wallace, director of the Symphonic Band, said.

On one hand, MICCA is such a deeply rooted tradition for the LHS ensembles that attending seems like the only natural choice.

"We've been doing it for so long it's something we all look forward to going to during the year...But it is a conversation we're having about if not the MICCA Festival, what else could we do? Which for right now, we've still chosen the MICCA Festival," Wallace said.

According to Jessica Billings-White, director of Repertoire and Symphony Orchestra, one of the most rewarding parts of MICCA is receiving the opportunity to work directly with one of the judges, all of whom are professional musicians. Their feedback is one of the key reasons why LHS ensembles participate in the festival.

"I think the students really really enjoy performing, that's our main thing, but we also enjoy hearing feedback from other clinicians that are from universities, or are conductors from around the area, or teachers from around the area. Always getting different opinions is really good. I mean, the constructive criticism helps us grow as an ensemble, so it's a great experience for us," Billings-White said.

This year, however, Chamber Orchestra and the three honors choruses will not be attending MICCA. Instead, Chamber Orchestra will be performing at Cary Hall with the Lexington Symphony Orchestra before their trip to Carnegie Hall, while the honors choruses will be using the time to prepare for the music department's annual Pops performance.

Despite the uncertainty of future attendance, MICCA still remains an appealing option for many in the LHS Music Department.

"I think that there is something really special about performing for others, and specifically performing for others who really know their stuff, and I hope that students sort of take away that same feeling of, I guess awe," Wallace said.

# Spirited Away

Emily Ma
News Editor

Throughout the week of Feb. 10, Lexington High School students walked through the halls dressed in lively outfits ranging from sports jerseys to Valentine's Day sweaters. This year, the 2023 Class Council collaborated with LHS Hype Squad to plan and organize the annual LHS Spirit Week tradition.

Leading into February vacation, the week is meant to create a lighthearted environment.

"Spirit Week is intended to bring a sense of unity to the school. The hectic nature of LHS causes students to become stressed with school work, and activities such as Spirit Week remind us students that we are in this together, and that there is a community in LHS," Chris Cervone, a senior and member of Hype Squad, said.

Cervone understands that although not everyone will participate in Spirit Week, he hopes that students try to bring a smile to each other's faces.

"I don't expect to get 100% participation from the school. Contrary to this, I also believe that there is some progress to be made in terms of community-based activities and further unifying the school. People typically correlate school spirit with athletics, but I define it as the sense of community, and I think that Spirit Week tends to increase that spirit through friends connecting to twin on Twin Day, or people laughing about each other's pajama outfits," Cervone said.

Johanna Simon, a senior, agrees with Cervone's vision of bringing the LHS community together.

"I think Spirit Week is really beneficial to the LHS community because as a more competitive school, we can sometimes be too focused on grades and academics. It's nice that we can come together as a community in a more constructive way," Simon said.

Simon believes that looking at Spirit Week through a broader lens helps students appreciate LHS traditions. It also comes at an ideal time for students, who often feel stressed as they tackle an increased workload before February vacation.

"Spirit Week seems kind of silly with the different outfits that are chosen, but if you look at the big picture, it's a nice tradition. I think it helps bring a bit of fun into students' lives when they're super stressed," Simon said.

# Artist of the Issue: Waka Okuda

Alex Fan
Shashwati Sanjay
Staff Writers

When the school day ends at Diamond Middle School, the art scene is just beginning. Diamond's Mural Club has taken on the task of not only beautifying the school, but also spreading positive messages. The Mural Club is overseen by none other than Wakako Okuda, a junior at Lexington High School and a leader of LHS's Illustration Club.

From a young age, Okuda loved art, but it was only during middle school that she started pursuing it more seriously.

"Back when I was in middle school, there was a huge drive to just get better at art. I would just draw every single day. I would carry a sketchbook around, and I just really loved drawing," Okuda said.

Okuda first discovered her passion for murals in Diamond's Art Installation Club. During middle school, she found that she enjoyed conveying messages to a broad audience through art forms such as murals or periaktoi sets, triangular panels used for set designs in theatre productions. Over time, the Art Installation Club has changed its name to "Ubuntu Crew," with "Ubuntu" being a Bantu term meaning "humanity." The decision was made by group members who felt that the new name best represented the values of the club. Every year, the crew receives a wall in Diamond Middle School where they paint a new mural.

"...[In] eighth grade, we painted a couple of pretty big walls, and that kinda got the whole project started," Okuda said. "Since then, I have been mentoring the current Ubuntu Club or Mural Club at the middle school."

As an assistant and leader, Okuda helps her students with their projects and acts as a role model. She critiques their work, gives them advice, and creates new designs.

"It's all about self-criticism and you trying to improve yourself. That's how you get good at art...by looking at yourself and saying 'Oh I need to do this, I need to improve that,'" Okuda said.

Okuda works alongside Rachael Alexander and Samuel Aman, the teachers who supervise the Ubuntu Crew to help students at Diamond come up with design ideas for the murals.

"It would be really cool if people could go see the work that we've done in Diamond. People walk by them every single day and it's great—the amount of compliments that we receive. I'm so grateful we have this opportunity. Not that many people get to leave a mark on their school. That's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It's great that we got to share our creative processes with so many people," Okuda said.

Photo by Athena Li
*Wakako Okuda, a junior, and leads LHS's Illustration Club.*

Okuda has expanded her art horizons beyond Lexington by painting walls in other schools as well. As a National Honor Society member, she has established connections with Boston City Year, an organization that paints murals and packs art supplies for schools throughout Boston.

Despite the rapid pace of her day to day life, art remains a constant source of pleasure for Okuda.

"Now that I'm in high school, it's hard to find the time to draw purely for fun... but if I feel really stressed out, I try to take a couple of minutes and immerse myself in something I really enjoy doing," Okuda said.

# Thespians Hone Skills in Beantown

Ashna Mitta
Sidharth Vij
Staff Writers

On Apr. 2, Lexington High School's Playwriting and Directing class will be taking a field trip to Boston to learn more about playwriting from professionals. The trip is a long held tradition at LHS.

"We are going to a playwriting festival called The Massachusetts Young Playwrights Project and it is a festival that takes place over several days, and each day there are five or six high schools that attend the festival," Jillian Singer-Wong, a performing arts teacher, said.

Singer-Wong looks forward to seeing the kids' hard work being performed by professionals.

"Ahead of time, the students from each school would have submitted [ten-minute] plays that they wrote...and two plays are selected from each school that will receive a staged reading on that day with professional actors and professional director. So we will get to see our own work performed and [work] from other schools," Singer-Wong said.

Students who are in the Playwriting and Directing class echo her excitement for the trip.

"I'm really looking forward to just watching some good theatre, I love both doing shows and seeing them so being able to go during the school day and be involved in something I love is really exciting," William Pullen, a senior and drama student at LHS, said.

Singer-Wong hopes that students will form relationships with others and gain new inspiration.

"I hope that they have an understanding of what it is like to be a playwright and have your work actually performed and to see what that is like. I also hope that they get to make connections with some of the students from other schools who are interested in something similar to them," Singer-Wong said.

Pullen has similar hopes for the trip, and looks forward to improving upon his skills.

"I hope to get better as both an actor and writer, as well as meet some more like-minded people," Pullen said.

# Trombonist Natalie Cressman at Jazz Festival

Anika Basu
Bryant Xia
Staff Writers

On March 13, the Lexington High School Jazz Department will host its annual Jazz Festival, where students can showcase their passion for music through masterclasses and concerts. This week-long process is guided by a guest artist who specializes in jazz.

"Generally, it's simply masterclasses in our normal class time. What we do is we have a guest artist come out every year and take over teaching our daytime jazz classes and evening ensembles. Then there's a culminating concert at the end of the week for the LHS Jazz Big Band, Jazz Ensemble, the Jazz Quintet, and the Jazz Combo. Those four ensembles specifically play with the guest artists in concert," Justin Aramati, director of Big Band, said.

What separates Lexington High School's Jazz Festival from similar events at other schools is the amount of time students have to work with and learn from the guest artist.

"A lot of high schools have a guest come in for a day or two. We are very lucky that we get somebody in for a whole week," Patrick Donaher, director of Jazz Ensemble, said.

Throughout the festival's over 20 years of history, the school has been fortunate enough to host many decorated artists, including two Grammy-winning jazz musicians: saxophonist Lauren Sevian and trombonist Luis Bonilla.

This year's guest artist, Natalie Cressman, is an exciting addition to the list. She is a New York-based singer, songwriter, and trombonist who has released five studio albums and has performed at world-renowned venues such as the Apollo Theater.

Inviting a professional musician depends on the connections that LHS teachers have. However, inclusive representation and the instrument of the artist are also important factors behind the process.

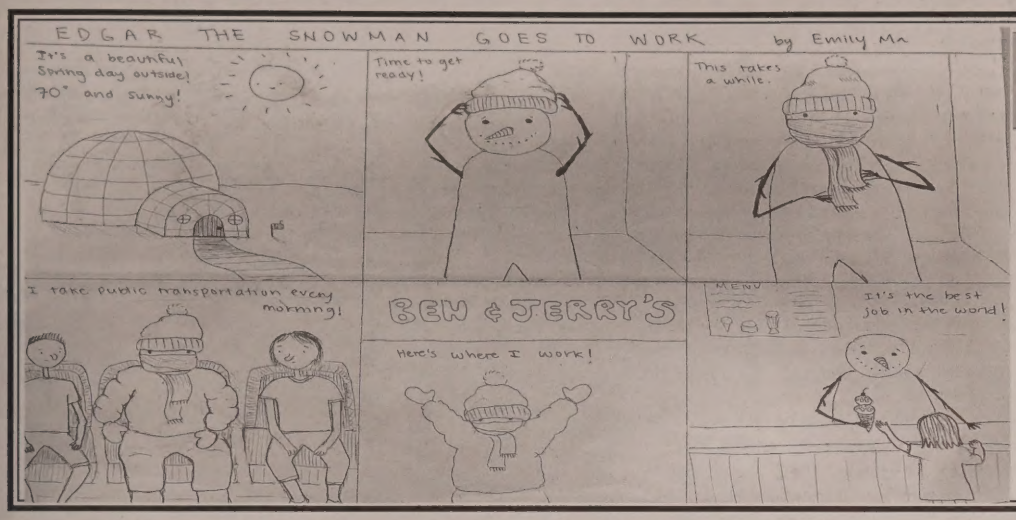
"Jazz programs nationally tend to be 10 to 15 percent female. In a school that's 50 percent [female], we've made a concerted effort to highlight female jazz musicians. So that's been part of my decision making...I wanted a trombonist this year because we try to rotate instruments and we're trying to build up our trombones just across the program," Donaher said.

Mira Ward, a senior percussionist in Jazz Combo, is looking forward to working with a fellow female jazz musician.

"There are very few girls doing jazz in general. I know that this year they are trying to incorporate more women since the guest artist is also a female musician. Anyone can play jazz, so it's important for female jazz musicians to have role models," Ward said.

With the festival approaching, the jazz bands have begun practicing their repertoire , including two tunes specifically requested by Cressman. The Jazz Program looks forward to another successful year of learning and collaboration.

"The concert at the end is a combination of all our work. Throughout the week, the guest artists make an effort to get to know everyone, and the experience is very rewarding," Ward said.


EDGAR THE SNOWMAN GOES TO WORK
by Emily Ma
It's a beautiful Spring day outside! 70° and sunny!
Time to get ready!
This takes a while.
I take public transportation every morning!
BEN & JERRY'S
Here's where I work!
MENU
It's the best job in the world!

■ Emily Ma
News Editor

# Ecofriendly Transitions

■ Ria Vasishtha
Columnist

You set it all out: bamboo utensils lie beside your stainless steel lunch box, which holds a beeswax-wrapped club sandwich. A Klean Kanteen metal water bottle stands next to your table mat. Before diving in for a bite, an aesthetic, filtered picture must be taken, because of course, your phone eats first.

Going low waste is meant to be an achievable goal that can be accomplished through minor adjustments. For instance, swapping out plastic household appliances harmful to the environment with reusable ones is one way to do so. The rising popularity of sustainable alternatives on social media, however, has created a narrow perspective of what a waste-free lifestyle should be. This unrealistic image pressures many aspiring environmentalists to fit into a certain mold that is financially unsustainable.

I adopted this mindset a few months ago and only ended up creating more unintentional waste. I splurged on metal containers and reusable foldable bags, when I could have begun by using the materials I already had at home and making gradual changes over time.

If you're transitioning to an eco-friendly life, I recommend you start by reusing what you already have. It saves money, uses less resources, and still gets the job done. I have stacks of plastic tupperware that I will eventually swap for more eco-friendly containers, but only after they start falling apart. Another viable way to reuse containers is by cleaning plastic jars or containers (like a mayonnaise jar or laundry soap bottle) and using them for other purposes, such as pencil holders or water mugs for painting.

Personally, when I end up throwing away a perfectly good item so that I can buy a more aesthetic, eco-friendly one, I feel even worse about my environmental footprint. You don't need a $50 hydroflask to be zero waste! Any reusable, plastic water bottle can serve the same purpose. After you've worn it out, you can invest in a longer-lasting green bottle.

As influencers and brands promote their "ideal eco-friendly" lifestyle, they steer away from less aesthetically-pleasing hacks. An example of a "hidden hack" that businesses avoid at all costs is to wear out the clothes you have before you transition to a wardrobe of more eco-friendly clothing. Furthermore, you can wear clothes more than once before putting them in the wash, especially if you only wear them for an hour or two. Not only does this make your clothes more valuable in your mind, but it significantly impacts the amount of discarded clothes which are burned each day. Essentially, the majority of clothes which are thrown away end up being burned and emitting fossil fuels, because countries have little use for garments deemed "waste".

The irony of this "social media promoting sustainability" situation is that social media is one of the main reasons that waste is created, whether that be through the promotion of fast fashion or the living of a lavish life. Influencers post pictures of their sustainable lifestyle which make going low waste seem unachievable due to the high expenses. This "eco-friendly" mold, embedded in our minds through the use of social media, has done the opposite of its intended purpose: to spread awareness. Rather, it just discourages the transition to a low waste lifestyle.

# Tourney Food

■ Evan Li
Columnist

When I joined the Lexington High School Debate Team freshman year, I never could've predicted the variety of food adventures I would have at tournaments. Food at debate tournaments varies drastically; some tournaments only offer stale pizza, chips, and bagels, while other tourneys cater from local restaurants. The more hospitable competitions even have debaters' parents from the host high school bring in their speciality dishes for a pseudo-potluck.

I recently went to a tournament that didn't offer any free food options for debaters. It was a three-day competition hosted by the University of Pennsylvania, where debaters had to walk to local restaurants or dining halls in between debate rounds for meals. On Friday, we left early in the morning for a five-hour drive to UPenn. The debate team usually stops by the Danbury mall for lunch on the way to tournaments in the Northeast. The Danbury mall food court offers a variety of options: classic hot dogs and burgers, Japanese Teriyaki grill, Chick-fil-a, McDonalds, and Subway. Debaters usually flock to the Chick-fil-A for fried chicken sandwiches and waffle fries. That was me freshman, sophomore, and junior year (I also went to McDonalds once or twice). But this year I've exclusively had chicken teriyaki paired with extremely mediocre boba from Papa Tea. Though exciting my freshman year, food at Danbury mall has become rather dull.

Debaters usually don't care much about food quality during tournaments. Pizza, coffee, and multiple bags of chips are enough to sustain some anxious, excitement-filled students for a whole day. The real hunger creeps in right at the end of the day, when rounds are over and debaters are free to roam around college campuses and various cities like Minneapolis and Atlanta. I've had some excellent ramen in Iowa and delicious Laotian food in Orlando. At UPenn, there were countless food stalls at Houston Hall, where most debaters convened in between rounds. These food stalls had everything from poke bowls and ramen to BBQ jerk chicken sandwiches. Off campus, there were tasty options like Shake Shack and Franklin Table's Food Hall (with Mediterranean food, pizza, and sushi). A quick ten minute walk from campus, Tea-do was 10 times better than anything Danbury Mall's Papa Tea could muster.

Debate trips have their ups and downs. Catching up on school work is hard, waking up at 6 a.m. on weekends is even worse. But if you go to the right tournaments, you can always count on food being something to look forward to.

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# Athletes of the Issue: Lexettes

Avni Kamat
Zhuoran Wen
Staff Writers

The Lexettes, coached by Saga Krantz and Ashley Tomich, are a nationally recognized synchronized skating team based in Lexington.

Composed of junior level athletes, the Lexettes compete both nationally and internationally at the second highest level of figure skating in the Hayden Synchronized Skating Program. Since the Lexettes train at the Hayden Recreation Center, a ten minute walk from Lexington High School, the team is comprised of a number of LHS students.

For Sheldon Gentling, a junior at LHS, the Lexettes are like a second family. After moving to Lexington from Minnesota last year to skate with the team, she has found the experience to be like no other.

"My favorite part about being on the Lexettes would be the opportunity to travel the world with my friends and work towards achieving our common goals," Gentling said.

Practicing 17-20 hours weekly, the teammates have formed a close-knit family.

"We have team bonding activities and dinners together each month," Gentling said.

However, the fun of being on the team also comes with the challenges of synchronized skating. As a sport that relies heavily on coordination and precision between each skater's movements, synchronized skating embodies the true definition of a team sport.

"Getting 16 people to all match is something that takes months of skating together to achieve. There are a lot of difficult elements as well, such as lifts, intersections, etc. that are very dangerous if each person doesn't do their own job," Hyunah Do, a senior and member of the Lexettes, said.

As a team that represents the United States internationally, the Lexettes follow a rigorous training schedule during the skating season.

"We practice four times a week as a team, during which we have ice sessions, fitness with our trainer, ballet, stretching, and off-ice," Khushi Morparia, an LHS senior on the team, said.

Photo by Anya Ghali
*Khushi Morparia skates for the Lexettes.*

This is in addition to the countless hours of rink time each individual team member must devote themselves to outside of practice sessions.

"Since the team practices are all in the afternoon, you have to find time to practice by yourself too, so a bunch of us wake up earlier to skate in the morning before school," Do said.

Sometimes, the dedication to the sport and the team makes it difficult to find time for school and friends.

"There is definitely a challenge in keeping up with school, since we miss about three to four days for each competition. You have to be on top of everything, and communicate with your teachers so that you don't fall behind," Do said.

Even with the challenging time commitment, their love for skating and their teammates makes every moment worth it for these LHS students.

"Even when practice is hard and tiring, we push each other to keep going and persevere. We all have a mutual passion for the sport and it comes across when we work together," Morparia said.

Do echoed this sentiment when referencing their choreographed performances.

"The three minutes that we are on the ice is the cumulation of months of blood, sweat, and tears that we have put in to perfect the program. It's our way of showing everyone else who we are and how much we've achieved as a team," Do said.

# Ski Team Turns to Water Skiing to Combat Lack of Snow

Kylin Gao
Garen Sahakian
Staff Writers

The winter of 2019-2020 was the warmest on record, and this has heavily impacted the Lexington High School Ski Team. With the lack of snow, the team's practice and race schedules have been greatly affected.

For the past three years, the ski team has followed a familiar routine after February break.

"We do dry land training, where we do exercising and conditioning, because there's usually not enough snow. And then after, we meet every Monday and Thursday, when we have a practice or a slalom or a giant slalom race, " Vilius Schmidt, a junior skiier, said.

Schmidt was disappointed that the weather has prevented the team's ability to race and practice.

"There have been quite a few races canceled. [It] is a little bit of a bummer," Schmidt said.

The warm weather has also had a significant impact on the quality of the snow, which makes skiing more difficult.

"Usually, colder snow is a little icier or crunchier, and warmer [snow]... is a little powdery. The crunchy snow is the best type of snow to be racing on," Schmidt said.

Throughout the years-long duration of Schmidt's skiing career, he has noticed a decline in the skiing experience.

"Each year there seems to be less and less [snow], and the ski season seems to be more volatile each year, and less consistent," Schmidt said.

The amount of snowfall plays a crucial role in determining the success the ski team can have in a season, and since it's uncontrollable, many members of the team are discouraged.

"It's frustrating that there's been a lack of snow because races and practices have been canceled. When it does snow there's always warm weather or rain afterward so whatever snow we did get is washed away," Schmidt said.

Not only does the snow limit how often the ski team can practice, but the never-ending rainy weather of New England makes it even harder to have suitable skiing conditions. The most ideal condition to ski on is packed snow, but the frequent rain combined with the lack of snow has prevented this from occurring.

Photo by Garen Sahakian
*Vilius Schmidt, junior and member of the Ski Team.*

"I joined the ski team last year because I like to ski a lot and I wanted to be able to ski more often. There were a lot of cancellations due to lack of snow last year, and this trend is continuing this year too," Schmidt said.

With the ski team awaiting proper ski slope conditions, many members are feeling uncertain about their future on the team. However, others are more optimistic.

"As it's still cold, the team will be fine, all f the mountains make enough snow to hold races," Alexander Coombs, a senior skiier, said.